

Exploring Contemporary Chinese Women's Views on Love, Marriage, and the Fear of Marriage

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Abstract: The institution of marriage has undergone significant changes throughout history, and in recent times, there has been a noticeable shift among women towards prioritizing love and personal fulfillment as key factors influencing their decision to marry. As women's education has advanced, there has been a corresponding decrease in the rate of marriage to a certain degree. Nevertheless, a discernible pattern has emerged wherein modern women are increasingly articulating apprehension towards the institution of marriage, citing a multitude of factors including familial obligations, economic encumbrances, and the potential curtailment of individual autonomy. This study employs a literature review method to examine the various aspects that contribute to the phenomenon of marriage apprehension among women in modern society. Specifically, it investigates the evolving perspectives of women towards love, marriage, and cultural norms as key determinants of this anxiety. The primary objective of this study is to examine women's perspectives on marriage and the factors contributing to their decision to remain unmarried. By doing so, this research aims to shed light on prevailing societal issues and the unrealistic societal expectations and demands placed on women in Chinese culture.

Keywords: Family responsibilities, Financial burdens, Loss of personal freedom

1. Introduction

Marriage is a significant life choice, and in modern times, women are placing greater emphasis on love and personal satisfaction as driving factors behind their decision to marry. Contemporary women exhibit an increasing apprehension towards marriage, primarily attributed to familial obligations, financial constraints, diminished autonomy, and various other factors. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the various variables that lead to the prevailing apprehension among women in modern society towards the institution of marriage. Specifically, this research will center on the evolving perspectives of women towards love, marriage, and cultural norms. The topic at hand pertains to the current perspectives of women towards love and marriage. An increasing number of women in contemporary society are opting to enter into marital unions primarily driven by romantic love. This trend is observed to be progressively on the rise with each passing year. Although there has been a general decline in the percentage of women who enter into marriage with the intention of fulfilling or adhering to their parents' expectations, the overall shift remains quite modest. In current society, there is a discernible trend among women towards adopting a more reasonable and cautious approach when considering the institution of marriage.

This study employed a literature review method to investigate Chinese women's perspectives on marriage and love, as well as the underlying causes for their apprehension towards marriage. The author conducted a comprehensive search for relevant materials, including the examination of factors contributing to the fears of young Chinese individuals regarding marriage [1]. This text presents several factors contributing to the apprehension of marriage among young individuals. This study examines the perspectives of contemporary female intellectuals towards marriage, love, and related topics [2].

The examination of the issue concerning women's apprehension towards marriage and the evolution of their perspectives on love and marriage can serve as a significant reflection of the challenges and transformations prevalent in contemporary society. The social issue at hand pertains to the persistent lack of transformation in the status of women inside the institution of marriage. Despite societal diversification, women continue to be perceived as occupying a subordinate position, devoid of substantial agency or contribution within the marital context. The transformation in societal dynamics can be attributed to the widespread adoption of Chinese education and the interaction with foreign cultures, resulting in significant shifts in the mindset of modern women. They no longer perceive themselves as being relegated to a subordinate position within marriage, nor do they believe that sacrificing their careers or personal aspirations for the sake of family is necessary. The purpose of my research is to examine these events with the aim of influencing societal perspectives on the role of women within the institution of marriage, and promoting greater acceptance of varied kinds of marital relationships.

2. Analysis of contemporary Chinese women's views on love, marriage, and the fear of marriage

Over the course of the last century, China has experienced a significant societal shift, transitioning from a feudal system to a redefined and modernized nation. Simultaneously, it is noteworthy that diverse social contexts are undergoing transformations, concomitant with a substantial shift in women's perspectives about the institution of marriage. Since the initiation of the reform and opening up policy, significant transformations have occurred in the perspectives of young women towards love and marriage. Presently, contemporary young women exhibit greater autonomy in matters of love, strive for increased equality within relationships, and have a more liberal attitude towards sexual concepts. Certain alterations exhibit good outcomes, whereas others manifest negative consequences [3]. Within the framework of a patriarchal societal structure, parental involvement in the matrimonial decisions of their offspring is deemed imperative, often facilitated by the intervention of a professional matchmaker. Historically, it was common for women's marriages to be predominantly arranged by their parents, with the primary consideration being the prospective partner's economic standing. Other factors, such as the presence of an emotional connection between the individuals, the man's respect for the woman, and the equitable distribution of household responsibilities, were often overlooked. In the majority of instances, parental figures tend to exhibit skepticism towards the concept of true love, instead emphasizing the notion that young women ought to pursue marriage with affluent individuals as a means to secure a prosperous existence. In the present era, women exhibit a notable inclination towards resisting the institution of marriage, instead favoring the notion that individuals who have a deep affection for one another will eventually want to engage into matrimony. This study centers on the evolution of women's perspectives towards love and marriage, as well as the underlying factors contributing to this transformation.

2.1. Views on marriage

In both traditional and modern societies, individuals of both genders adhere to certain criteria when selecting marriage partners and romantic interests. These criteria may vary in significance depending on factors such as emotional compatibility, physical appearance, familial circumstances, and the level of freedom in the society. A survey was conducted to gather data on the factors that individuals are most likely to consider as the foundation for marriage. The findings revealed that the highest proportion, 22.4%, attributed their choice to "personal qualities." This was closely followed by "personal ability" at 20.1%. "Mutual affection" ranked third, accounting for 17.9% of the respondents' preferences. According to the findings, the percentage of respondents who considered "family opinion" as a significant factor was 10.5%. On the other hand, "family background," "appearance," and "educational background" were deemed less influential, each accounting for less than 10% of the responses. Notably, the option of "matching family" had the lowest level of endorsement among participants, with only 5.2% selecting it as a relevant factor [4]. The fundamental principles of matrimony have persisted since antiquity. However, it is possible that the divergence in perspectives on marriage between females and males might be observed in their inclination to establish marital unions based on emotional considerations [1]. According to the cited source, it was found that 50.5% of male respondents selected "mutual affection" as their preferred foundation for marriage. In contrast, 59.7% of female respondents chose this option, indicating a 9.2% higher preference compared to males [4].

According to a report by China Economic Management Daily, the marriage rate in China had an increase from 6.7 per thousand in 2000 to 9.9 per thousand in 2013. However, subsequent years witnessed a consistent reduction in the marriage rate, ultimately reaching 4.8 per thousand in 2022. The divorce rate experienced an increase from 0.96 per thousand in 2000 to 3.1 per thousand in 2020. However, it subsequently declined to 2.0 per thousand in 2021 as a result of the implementation of the divorce cooling-off period. According to available data from 1990, the mean age at which males entered into their first marriage was 23.59, while women typically married at the age of 22.15. In the year 2000, the mean age at initial marriage increased to 25.11 years for males and 23.28 years for females. As of 2020, the mean age at which individuals enter into their first marriage has increased to 29.38 years for males and 27.95 years for females. An increasing number of women in modern times are opting to enter into marriage primarily driven by romantic love, with this trend showing a consistent upward trajectory over the years. Although there has been a general decline in the percentage of women who marry with the intention of fulfilling or complying with their parents' expectations, the overall shift in this regard has been minimal. In current society, there is a discernible trend among women towards adopting a more sensible and cautious approach when it comes to the institution of marriage. Between the years 2009 and 2013, there was a decline in the percentage of women aged 20 to 39 who were married, from 77.93% to 67.06 percent. However, by 2019, this proportion had experienced an increase, reaching 72.72%. According to a study conducted in 2019, the proportion of unmarried individuals aged 30 to 34 was found to be 18.16 percent for males and 8.7 percent for women. These figures were seen to be comparatively lower than those reported in the majority of developed nations [5]. Based on data from the Statistical Bulletin of Social Service Development in 2017, it is evident that the divorce rate in China reached a significant level of 3.2% during that year. It is widely acknowledged that the proliferation of misguided perspectives on marriage and love constitutes a crucial factor contributing to the observed increase in divorce rates. The prevailing pessimistic perspective among young women towards love and marriage encompasses a unilateral hesitance to enter into matrimony and bear children. This phenomenon has significant implications for the overall population reproduction within society, leading to a reduction in population numbers [3].

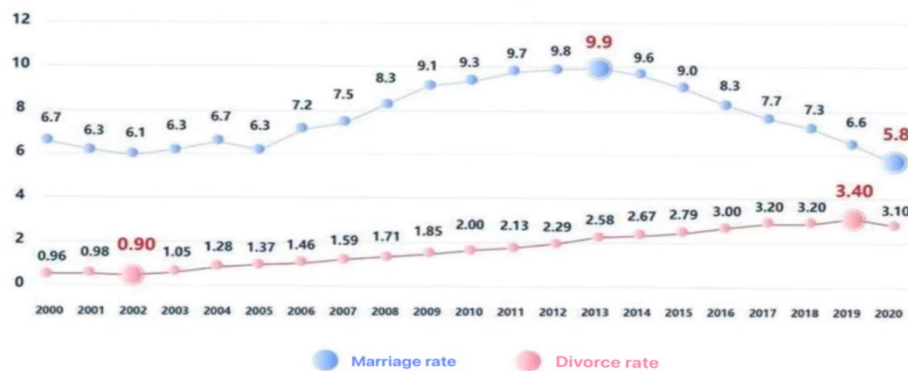


Figure 1: Statistical report of the Ministry of Civil Affairs 2020 (2000-2020 China marriage rate and divorce rate change) [3]



Figure 2: Ministry of Civil Affairs, Yuwa population 2021 [3]

What are the components or elements that comprise the institution of marriage? A quarter of the economic foundation, a mere 5% of the burden, and the emotional experiences of both genders. The institution of marriage is founded upon the principle of love, with the initiation and termination of sexual intercourse contingent upon the presence or absence of this affectionate bond. Nevertheless, within contemporary society, economic circumstances frequently emerge as a significant determinant to be taken into account within the context of marital relationships. Consequently, individuals are unable to solely form or terminate marital bonds based solely on the criterion of affection [6]. In contemporary society, a significant portion of the younger population, approximately 25% of the economic base, contemplates matters pertaining to personal finances. However, women exhibit a greater preoccupation with the dynamics of romantic relationships between individuals of different genders. Presently, women display a heightened desire for genuine affection, seeking partners who embody qualities such as mutual consideration, respect, and shared responsibilities. This inclination deviates from the conventional notion of familial roles, wherein men primarily engage in external

pursuits while women assume domestic responsibilities. Modern ladies would consider this family setup. The loss of economic independence might be seen as tantamount to the loss of personal independence, the right to freedom of speech, and a diminished status within the family.

2.2. Views on the fear of marriage

What are the underlying factors contributing to the apprehension towards marriage among present-day Chinese women? Based on a survey conducted among a sample of over 1,000 individuals born in the 1990s in Guangdong province, it was found that the primary factors contributing to apprehension towards marriage include familial obligations, heightened financial obligations, and a perceived loss of personal autonomy. Numerous individuals in the younger generation have the belief that the decision to enter into matrimony or remain unmarried is often determined by a careful assessment of the pros and cons involved. According to a source from China Youth Daily [2], According to China Economic Management Daily, the significant expense associated with delivery is considered a crucial determinant contributing to declining fertility rates. Consequently, it is imperative to mitigate the financial burden associated with childbirth, as well as the subsequent costs of parenting and schooling. The salient matter at hand pertains to contemporary women, who face a weighty deliberation about the decision to enter into matrimony. This arises from the prevailing circumstances surrounding married life in China, whereby women are compelled to relinquish their familial and occupational commitments upon electing to wed. In certain instances, the institution of marriage may not yield significant advantages for women, but rather impose additional responsibilities and challenges. Below are few remarks that have been gathered regarding women's perspectives on the institution of marriage.

“If I were to enter into matrimony, I would be obligated to prepare meals for the entire household, a task that I find quite intolerable.” “The potential for experiencing happiness through marriage is uncertain and may also entail the possibility of sorrow.” “I am of the opinion that I am self-sufficient, solely generating the necessary income for my personal needs, without concern for the well-being of others.” It is posited that even in cases where individuals enter into matrimony based on romantic affection, that affection may ultimately diminish with time. Numerous comparable remarks have been made, articulating apprehension and repulsion towards the institution of marriage. These women hold the belief that following marriage, they will assume the majority of household responsibilities and will experience significant physical discomfort in the process of childbirth. The first factor is that, due to the prevailing social milieu, women presently perceive marriage as nonessential. They no longer feel compelled to depend on marriage as a means of establishing themselves in society, as they have come to rely on their own capabilities. In certain instances, marriage is regarded as a source of encumbrance and restriction for women.

The intersection of societal expectations, family duties, financial pressures, and personal freedom plays a significant role in shaping contemporary women's perspectives of marriage. To begin with, contemporary women exhibit apprehension towards the institution of marriage due to the subsequent responsibilities that ensue. Following marriage, women assume the onus of providing for the attire, accommodation, and transportation needs of a substantial household, eventually transforming into unpaid caretakers without any accompanying advantages. Furthermore, numerous women hold the belief that marriage entails significant responsibilities. Specifically, marriage necessitates the assumption of both personal and shared financial burdens. Consequently, women are required to meticulously manage their expenditures, taking into account the allocation of finances for various aspects of the marital union. Lastly, it is worth noting that a significant number of young women get into marriage primarily to fulfill their parents' expectations or to avoid societal criticism for deviating from the norm of marriage and conforming to societal standards.

3. Conclusion

This paper examines the evolving perspectives of contemporary Chinese women towards marriage and love, as well as the underlying factors contributing to their apprehension about marriage, through a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of available literature. This paper still has several deficiencies. The author's limited time constraints prevented them from doing an extensive literature search and exploring women's perspectives on marriage in greater depth. This paper still has numerous deficiencies. Furthermore, the author failed to undertake a comprehensive literature review and survey pertaining to the perspectives of women towards marriage. In the event that the author is afforded an opportunity to enhance this article at a later time, it will undertake a more comprehensive investigation and seek guidance from a wider range of pertinent scholarly sources. Furthermore, a comprehensive study was undertaken to examine the perspectives of 100 Chinese women towards love and marriage. Subsequently, a meticulous analysis of the collected data was conducted, resulting in a comprehensive chart interpretation. The primary objective of the research is to raise awareness within society regarding the comparatively low status of women in marriage and the frequent disregard for their contributions within the family unit. Hence, it is the honest goal that society will recognize and value the significant contributions made by women, while also embracing diverse forms of marital unions.

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